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EDUCATION AND POLITICAL COMPETENCE--A PRESCRIPTIVE APPROACH.

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THE AUTHOR PROPOSED THAT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS SHOULD FOCUS UPON POLITICAL RESOCIALIZATION, THAT IS, THE ATTEMPT TO CREATE NEW COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE, AND BEHAVIORAL DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL LEARNING. THE CURRENT POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS SERVES TO REINFORCE TRADITIONAL MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES RATHER THAN TO EXPAND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG THE PREVIOUSLY APOLITICAL STRATA. TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION REQUIRES DIRECT ACTION UPON THE EXISTING EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES. OTHERWISE CURRENT PROCESSES WILL CONTINUE TO FOSTER DEPENDENCE UPON AUTHORITY SYSTEMS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACQUIRING SHARED POWER AND INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE WILL BE RESTRICTED. SCHOOLS ARE ONE OF THE FEW INSTITUTIONS WHICH SIGNIFICANTLY REACH INTO THE LIVES OF LOWER STATUS CHILDREN AND WHICH HAVE THE BEHAVIORAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY. A RESTRUCTURING OF EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES WILL PROVIDE THE CONDITIONS WHICH ARE CLOSELY CORRELATED WITH HIGH EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL PERFORMANCE. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE ON POLITICS AND EDUCATION (UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, JUNE 14-17, 1966). (GB)

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Education and Political Competence: A Prescriptive Approach*

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"Politics exists for the purpose of progressively removing the most stultifying obstacles to a free human development, with priority for the worst obstacles."

Christian Bay, "Politics and Pseudopolitics"

Value Premises: Schoolman and Politics

My objectives in this paper are to suggest some alternative uses of our research into the processes of political socialization, specifically as they develop in formal educational systems. There are three foci of this effort, namely articulating normative foundations, selectively drawing on research findings about political learning in educational systems, and "reversing" a standard causal paradigm in studies of participation in order to enhance intellectual and "real world" efforts to raise levels of political competence among meaningful populations.

First, I shall spell out the premises that underlie this reformulation, premises based on my conceptualization and "reading" of the current state of political socialization research.

1. Our major effort has been to discover factors girding the stability of the American political system.[1] While a worthwhile effort, I take as my point of departure the findings that the American political system is highly stable and that the cumulative impact of socializing agencies is to reinforce allegiance to the regime, achievement values, and that open-ended pluralism

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characterizing American political processes.

By contrast, sufficient attention has not been paid to Political Resocialization, namely efforts to change the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of political learning.

2. Political resocialization would seem to be a critical process for groups undergoing extensive initial contact with the variety of processes involved in compromise democracy. In other words, groups and individuals in transition from an object to an active role in American society (e.g. the Negro, the young, the poor) are especially likely to experience a heightened political consciousness. The analogue to this proposition is found in E.E. Schattsneider's prophetic thesis that meaningful expansion of our political universe (those who by varying empirical criteria may be considered to be political participants) would follow the politicization of issues relevant to formerly apathetic groups.[2] Moreover, as you will recall, Schattsneider foresaw expanding scopes of political conflict as the mechanism for such political activity. In the substantive context of the civil rights movement, in light of significant political activities by youth, and in relationship to the engagement of the poor in political life, the critical "real world" needs of effective political learning become obvious.

3. Formal educational systems are critical elements in effective political learning for groups emerging into civility, namely actively engaged in campaigning, bargaining, and coping with complex political processes. The divergence with orthodox educational pedogogy becomes apparent when the rhetoric of "citizenship training" is confronted with realities of neophyte political

activity. Here, for instance, is Robert Coles account of civic meaning among Negro adolescents in the contemporary South:

> They tend to be rather controlled and studious people. It is that they are under attack and they must prepare themselves and one another for such unusual strains. To hold up under these strains requires devotion, energy, and ingenuity. Perhaps only the young, the still unattached and unemployed and unsettled, can take this on. (3)

Moreover, to present another analogue, uses of educational resources to train politically competent members among formerly apolitical strata complements the relevance of education (or at least academic credentials) for social mobility. Mannheim once suggested a politically neutral school of politics unimbued with either conservative, liberal, or socialistic ideology. But that perspective, firmly anchored to the requirements of nineteenth-century politics, seems too remote, too irrelevant to the political needs of the potential publics we have discussed. The extended scope and longevity of formal education meeting the technological and occupational competence needs of this society also present fruitful opportunities to <u>officially</u> enhance civic skills within this prolonged "youth moratorium." Available evidence also suggests the high status and absence of alternative social cues for lower status youth. Therefore, the denigration of class and ethnic bases of political attitude formation among lower status children by middle class teachers (who suggest an abstract "independent voter" ideal without providing the means to achieve or reject it) contributes to "the tendency for children from low status homes.... to be retarded in their socialization into the participant involvement (of) society."[4]

4. While much extant political socialization research suggests a <u>crescive development</u> of political perspectives, supported by

supportive primary group experiences (open family structure, personal ego competence, warm, democratic peer group relationships), the use of formal educational systems to enhance political competence rests on the notion of a "multiplier effect" to compensate for unsatisfactory or irrelevant early socialization experiences. Moreover, it offers a contextual site for politically relevant learning considered to be highly legitimate within our knowledge-based society.

While not overestimating the curative powers (and political independence) of educational systems, it does seem possible to provide compensatory political education for "politically involved, low scorers," namely those groups whose personal situation and outside tutelage dictates the rationality of political activity, but whose storehouse of civic experience is limited -- limited in part by the absence of prior political learning in their immediate milieux.

The Behavioral Uses of Political Learning

From the storehouse of learning theories, I select a contextual and cognitive approach to the issue of political learning in formal educational systems.[5] I am suggesting that overt situational changes (simulating "real" political change) produces altered publically relevant perceptions, and these in turn influence processes of attitude formation. While it is true that the impact of the "operative curriculum" (the mosaic of teachers, class materials, climates of opinion) on behavior is exceedingly difficult to measure, resocialization in the situational context is critical for groups without rich socializing experiences in the home, the peer group, and, indeed, the formal school structure.

The contextual change, designed to enhance attributes of participatory democracy, follows a basic shift in value premises associated with the school's role in "training democratic citizens." In the liberal ethos, expanding the opportunities for both educational achievement and political participation was the intellectual keynote. Acting on a more radical concept -- a concept being developed in response to pressures of civil rights, innovating behavior on the part of government officials and other agencies -- the basic effort is to create the conditions of opportunity associated with high educational and political performance.[6]

While the liberal style relied on providing appropriate stimuli, in the form of "model" teachers, student government, extracurricular activities with politicizing consequences, a more radical approach to developing political skills among emerging groups operates to alter the cognition of political rules, authority figures, and styles by overtly creating conditions in which altered cognition supports and reinforces newly acquired attitudes and behavior with political consequences.

For instance, Warren Hagstrom and others have acted on the premise that a sense of powerless was critical in explaining cabalistic and ineffective public responses by the poor. Acting on a revised version of existential social thought, Hagstrom and his associates in Syracuse conducted research in which organization leading to "real" shared power among the poor was the major devise for directly enhancing feelings of political competence.[7] From this and other experiences in direct political action, the student of political learning (and educational policy-makers who will listen) can achieve new insights into the public relevance of their work.

He may also constructively reappraise existing findings, findings that generally find little relationship between educational context and increased political trust, participation, or sense of political efficacy. Along with the congery of other factors that influence political neophytes (and more directly the political structure of school systems), it must be said that our knowledge of American educational politics provides little evidence to indicate a conscious inclusion of supports to democratic citizenship in the form of mechanisms designed to liberate feelings of potency, trust, and civic competence. Moreover, since the school system is often the major authoritative institution to be confronted by lower status youth (and there are relatively few other potential political reference groups), the school's internal authority structure, its system of rewards and sanctions, and the content of its "operative curriculum," in the form of teacher expectations, and verstehen of perceptions students bring into the classroom.

Let me draw on my studies of a Milwaukee youth group to illustrate, among youngsters above the margin of poverty and with high personal spirit and physical presence, a political relationship to the school that might be termed "cutting up at the margins."[8]

John, one of the boys, complains that the schools teach him only about olden times (sic) and not how science and rockets work. I ask about curriculum reform -- what should the schools teach, if the head of the school system were here, what would you tell him? The silence is prolonged because in the tradition of mass democracy, they know where the shoe pinches, they are not cobblers.

Their heroes are those of sports and the mass media. Significantly, they lack many known behavior models in their existential

base. Only the urban caretakers of social organizations they utilize are present for modeling to these contemporary young without past or future roots. Nor do the terms of Afro-American identity or the pride in being a Negro, frequent in the writings of the ascending black intellegensia, have much meaning to them. I ask about cultural artifacts -- dance and music, literature and sports. These too are products of the mass media to these adolescents in the technological stage of the urban core. Most aspire to be professional men (teachers, psychiatrists). In a few cases, I sense the aspiration to genuine, based on knowledge of the roles and the means to achieve it. But most say that they will fulfill their fantasies as baseball players or become garbagemen. They do not understand -- no one has taught them to understand -- the relevance of the cultural institutions and its symbols that dominate their own lives.

In these cases, it is less the marginality of blackness and powerlessness than the absence of standards of judgment obtained in contact with cultural institutions. Lacking their own cultural base, they simply do not know the norms of appropriate behavior in the cultural institutions, such as the schools, they confront. Therefore, they do not understand the sanctions leveled against their physical presence and its seemingly integrated expression. Beneath the dazzle of the technical and commercial superstructure, there is the absence of verstehen.

Given these conditions the channels of their psychic energy are not difficult to follow.

Fred is impassive most of the time, fools around, does not pay attention to the important things the visiting Political Scientist is telling him. Thus I suggest to him an ordinary salutation: "Man, how you making it." Then, in the same normal voice with the

normal greeting, I say: "Boy, how are you making it." The recognition is instant -- the tightening of the gray eyes in the black face. Moreover, he can put into meaningful words the feelings that now animate this perceptive analyst of language.

Henry is a minority member in a group of minority group adolescents, a Polish-Catholic youth in a predominantly Negro group. He has been through the city school system, beginning in a high quality academic high school and concluding his formal education in the city's vocational school. "I was transferred for bad behavior." His freedom from even that limbo in the educational system was secured by 265 cuts. School to him is a waste of time ("they don't teach you nothin'"), yet he can name precisely the courses in his senior year curriculum.

Jesse, a particularly sensitive youth, says it more overtly:

> "I wish the teachers would stop cutting on me so. I walk into the room (attired in pegged pants) and right away the teacher says: 'Look, the troublemaker is here again.'"

Thou shalt not cut on me. It is the preservation of dignity, the fear of being thought small, a boy, that animates much of their overt behavior and the moral code guiding it. Yet as I have suggested, they lack cultural standards of schpe. Thus they engage in a defensive strategy: the preservation of selfhood. They seem to make out all right in the physical skirmish of their daily life. It is in coping with the expectations of the school system, and in contacts with officials of the law, that more problems occur.

The learned physical responses of the block and the club do not work in immediate confrontations with teachers and policemen. Yet, despite these facts, most of these boys do adjust and get along with the real world of school and community. They do not say 'poor little me.' Moreover, their projected

sence of generalized political effectiveness and trust seem fairly high. Moreover, if rationality assumes an awareness of behavioral consequences, they are very rational in perceiving the school's external demands. As one youngster comments, "Man, you can't even be a garbageman without a high school or college diploma."

Although a few are school dropouts, most play the system (they are very astute in their perceptions of power and rewards) while, at the same time, blocking out enough system behavior to preserve their sense of selfhood. This pragmatic strategy is likely to yield a diploma and the complete irrelevance of what could possibly be meant by the term "liberal education."

To summarize, the adolescent boys described cut up at the margins (in response to the school norms they reject) to preserve their sense of dignity, but staying in school is important enough to effectively repress self-expression and its political consequences. It is difficult to conjure up a more effective bifurcation of substance and procedure. To the vocational demands of an industrial society, a rational vocational response. More than internalized impulse control designed to achieve long-term goals, there is a segmented expression, a prudential compromise between physical reality and selfhood, and the learned needs of a diploma society.

Most of our young men are neither authoritarians nor hate authority figures. Teachers are judged on their individual merits (usually personal competence and fairness) -- it is the melange of formal school norms that are more universally seen as arbitrary. The more I listened to the critical school experiences of these young men, the more evident it became to me that behind their

concern about fair treatment and the preservation of selfhood was a collective expression for an inclusive code of social conduct. In terms they did not use, but could fruitfully apply, teachers and policemen should act with substantive rationality; the uses of school authority and resources should be integrated with their requirements in learning academic and political behavior.

Rather than personal hostility to teachers and policemen, there is a yearning for a social contract in which their physical expressiveness is linked to orderly, accumulated knowledge of their larger world. In psychoanalytic terms, motivation is not blocked but inappropriate to the subtle and often contradictory norms of school and police administration. Thus the response: "Include me and my complex of behavior and attitudes in formal learning of significance and I will no longer need to cut up at the margins." To these boys, then, the incorporation of their own self-acceptance into cultural forums is of major significance.

More systematic evidence of Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson confirm the accumulated impact of family and peer influences on achieved self-exteem and interpersonal competence. Beyond that their data suggests the "vulnerability" to formal authority models in the educational process. Since lower status youth are often encouraged by their parents to seek a way of life and political styles which their parents themselves have not attained, they are almost forced to reject as models the parents who have encouraged their ambitions. The dependency which they show in relation to adult leaders and teachers is also understandable. These adults,

usually from the middle class, represent all that the adolescent has been taught to want and work toward.[9] When combined with egophobism or low self-esteem, itself related to low interest in public affairs, the enhanced interpersonal threat of the school system, replete with its middle class norms and teachers, is likely to create problems in effectuating participatory norms among apolitical youth.[10]

Kenneth Langton has presented convincing evidence that heterogeneous class peer groups (and one assumes heterogeneous competencies, self-esteems, life styles) resocializes lower status youth in the direction of dominant American middle class attitudes about the worth of democracy, the importance of voting and protecting free speech, and frequency of political discussion itself.[11] Yet, encouraging as these findings appear, they do not effect our core metropolitan areas where racial and class homogeneity often pervade the neighborhoods and hence the school systems.

These findings, and supporting literature cited, provide empirical evidence of a "trickle up" process of democratic competence in accord with the liberal ethos discussed earlier in that opportunities for resocialization are broadened with the breakdown of class, life style, and ethnic insularity. But creating the conditions of democratic participation, in accord with the more "radical" educational thesis of using authoritative allocation of educational resources to motivate change, means acting directly upon the educational structures themselves -- their power structure, allocation of rewards and sanctions, distribution of statuses and opportunities for role experimentation.

Drawing together the major threads of this paper, the absence

of prior experiences in democratic norms contributes to an increased dependence on legitimate authority systems, such as the schools, and teachers as models of social expectation. Lacking extensive prior opportunities for acquiring shared power, trust, and interpersonal competence, faced with the necessity of prolonged formal education to function in our economy, restructuring the internal "operative curriculum" in the schools promises the "multiplier effect" to retain some qualitative political participation sought by schoolmen in the theme that runs from John Dewey to Harold Taylor.

In line with the learning approach suggested, behavioral opportunities for sharing power, learning varied roles (including the teacher's role), and using the formal curriculum to deal with genuine social and personal problems (consumer practices, power relationships effecting the Negro or impoverished community, organizational skills in electoral practices) provide new perspectives of reality that, in turn, feed self-concepts and attitude formation. Of course, such experimentation requires surplus psychic resources among schoolmen and their allies and political support to enlarge the public relevance of educational systems. Such changes are likely to be painful, but they are more mature responses from a society with "civic surplus" than punitive repression, unrealistic myths about "good citizens," and resulting destructive responses directed against public institution.

Research Implications: Reversing A Causal Paradigm

Correlates of political participation and antecedents to political learning have fruitfully drawn on much intellectual

energy. Based on prescriptive theories and practices designed to expand political capabilities (e.g. participatory norms), I propose "reversing our causal paradigms" by making induced structural change (in experimental studies, co-operative school systems) the independent variables thus creating the opportunities for revised cognition and behavior of political relevance, Examples of behavioral patterns to be taught rather than simply authoritative models of the desired political style are probably more useful in achieving political resocialization.[12] Although this requires a more activistic attitude about political learning than has commonly been accepted in the academy, the "real world" models of the poverty program, Operation Head Start, and a myriad of civil rights and neighborhood organizations suggest the importance placed on altering behavioral patterns in strategies of long-term attitudinal change.

Sharing political power, providing unmanipulated experiences with activistic roles (without the "natural" middle-class monopoly), and relating the formal curriculum to the felt needs of student populations provides the structural base on which political life could flourish.

Much of what I have said applies primarily to the "experantial base," the critical interpersonal experiences forming motivations and political change. The concern with the schools stresses its potential scope and legitimacy of experimental political learning. Education is not life, but schools are one of the few major, legitimate institutions that significantly reach into the life of the lower status child with helpful intent. Therefore, it seems a most appropriate place to dispel civic romantism and provide the skills and "ropes" required of an effective citizenry.

In conclusion, the obvious fact that such changes will not necessarily have repercussions in other areas of political life need not prevent social action.

In Kenneth Kenniston's words:

> An understanding of the complexity of society can be an aid to social planning, helping us identify those points and moments of maximum leverage where small actions can have large consequences. There is often a kind of social "multiplier effect"; there are virtuous as well as vicious circles. Far from discouraging social planning and action, an understanding of psychosocial process can help us guide and direct it more intelligently. (13)

FOOTNOTES

1. This theme dominates such superior contributions as Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Cultural Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963); "Political Socialization: Its Role in the Political Process," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 361 (September 1965); and important contributions by Easton, Hess, and others.

2. E.E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America (New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), pp. 97-128.

3. Robert Coles, "Serpents and Doves: Non-Violent Youth in the South," in The Challenge of Youth, edited by Erik H. Erikson, (Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), p. 250. Although hostile and anxious impulses are often brought to politics in youth movements, it would be foolhardy to so restrict our critical vision. A broader analysis of one such movement is found in Robert H. Somers, "The Mainsprings of the Rebellion: A Survey of Berkeley Students in November, 1964," in The Berkeley Studnet Revolt: Facts and Interpretations (Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 530-558.

4. Robert D. Hess, Judith V. Torney, and David Jackson, The Development of Basic Attitudes and Values Toward Government and Citizenship During the Elementary School Years: Part I, Cooperativ Research Project No. 1078, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 304.

5. A useful summary of cognitive development research may be found in Paul H. Mussen, The Psychological Development of the Child (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 31-56.

6. I have drawn on the stimulating analysis of resocialization in developing American educational patterns Martin Trow offers in "Two Problems in American Public Education," unpublished manuscript, May, 1966. See also Stanton Wheeler, "The Structure of Formally Organized Socialization Settings," in Orville G. Brim, Jr. and Stanton Wheeler, Socialization After Childhood: Two Essays (New York, John Wiley, 1966), especially pp. 83-98.

7. Warren Hagstrom, "Poverty, Race and Politics," publication of the Syracuse University Youth Development Center, Revised, May, 1963.

8. Edgar Litt, "The Cool Pragmatists: Cutting Up at the Margins," unpublished manuscript, March, 1966.

9. Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson, The Adolescent Experience (New York, Wiley, 1966), pp. 338-340.

10. In his Society and the Adolescent Self-Image (Princeton,

Princeton University Press, 1965), Morris Rosenberg, after presenting strong relationships between adolescent self-esteem and interest in public affairs, thinks that were people with low self-esteem (egophobes) not so likely to say that they were highly concerned with their own problems, they would be more receptive to public affairs exposure. It is precisely in creating opportunities to socialize personal and neighborhood problems that schools can contribute to enhancing participatory life styles.

11. Kenneth P. Langton, "Peer Group and School and the Political Socialization Process," unpublished manuscript, May, 1966. His findings differ among a Jamaican politics where party and class structure are less "middle class" than in the American polity.

12. Experimental evidence of the impact of learned task skills on such factors as authoritarianism and anomie are reported in Paul E. Breer and Edwin A. Locks, Task Experience As A Source of Attitudes (Homewood, Illinois, The Dorsey Press, 1965), especially pp. 113-161. The importance placed on instrumental reward in attitude change is extremely relevant to, for instance, enhancing political effectiveness as a consequence of more participation, or securing positive responses as a consequence of interpersonal relations with teachers, public officials, etc.

13. Kenneth Kenniston, The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1960), pp. 432-433.